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The psychological type profile of Christians participating in fellowship groups or in small  
study groups: insights from the Australian National Church Life Survey

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**Abstract**

The Australian National Church Life Survey draws on psychological type theory to facilitate insight into the connection between individual psychological profiles and preferences for different religious expressions. Drawing on data provided by 2,355 participants in the 2006 congregation survey, this analysis profiles those members of church congregations who are drawn to participation in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups, or to participation in fellowship and social groups. The key findings are that extraverts and feeling types are over-represented in the fellowship and social groups and that intuitive types are over-represented in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups.

*Key words:* congregational studies, psychological type, Australian National Church Life Survey, churchgoers.

## **Introduction**

### **Psychological type theory**

Psychological type theory has its origins in the pioneering work of Carl Jung (1971) and has been developed and has been operationalised in a series of type indicators, temperament sorters or type scales, including the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978) and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005).

At its heart psychological type theory distinguishes between two core psychological processes. The perceiving process is concerned with how data are gathered; in Jung's terms this is the irrational process. The judging process is concerned with how data are evaluated; in Jung's terms this is the rational process. Within the perceiving process the two perceiving functions are defined as sensing (S) and intuition (N). Sensing types are concerned with facts and with details. They are the practical people who prefer to rely on past experience rather than to look for future possibilities. Intuitive types are concerned with meanings and with associations. They are the imaginative people who prefer to trust their inspirations about future possibilities rather than to rely on past experience. Within the judging process, the two judging functions are defined as thinking (T) and feeling (F). Thinking types are concerned with objectivity and truth. They are the logical people who test the coherence of systems and institutional structures. Feeling types are concerned with interpersonal relationships and human values. They are the humane people who care about the people operating the system and the people whose lives are affected by institutional structures.

Alongside the two processes (perceiving and judging), psychological type theory also distinguishes between the orientations and the attitudes toward the outer world. The orientations are concerned with the sources of psychological energy. The distinction is between introversion (I) and extraversion (E). Introverts are energised by the inner world and

by their inner life. Introverts need quiet for reflection and space for themselves. Extraverts are energised by the outer world of people and theory. Extraverts need people and social company. They reflect best with others.

The attitudes are concerned with how people function in the outer world. The distinction is between judging (J) and perceiving (P). Judging types turn their preferred judging function (thinking or feeling) to the outer world. There they are seen to be organised, planned and structured people. Perceiving types turn their preferred perceiving function (sensing or intuition) to the outer world. There they are seen to be flexible, spontaneous, open people.

### **Congregational studies**

Psychological type theory has made a useful contribution to congregational studies in a variety of ways: by identifying the distinctive psychological profile of churchgoers compared with the general population; by documenting differences in the psychological profile of those attracted to different church traditions; and by charting the connections between psychological profile and spirituality. Psychological type theory has been introduced to congregational studies in North America by Gerhardt (1983), Delis-Bulhoes (1990), Ross (1993, 1995), and Rehak (1998), in the United Kingdom by Craig, Francis, Bailey, and Robbins (2003), Francis, Duncan, Craig, and Luffman (2004), and Francis, Robbins, and Craig (2011), and in Australia by Robbins and Francis (2011). An overview of developments in this field has been provided by Francis (2009).

An initial comparison of the psychological type profile of male and female churchgoers with the wider population is illustrated, for example, by Francis, Robbins, Williams, and Williams (2007), drawing on a sample of Anglican churchgoers in England and the population norms published by Kendall (1998). The main finding from this comparison concerned the undue weighting towards sensing, feeling and judging in church

congregations. Among women ISFJ accounted for 32% of churchgoers, compared with 18% of the general population, and ESFJ accounted for 28% of churchgoers compared with 19% of the general population. Among men ISFJ accounted for 19% of churchgoers, compared with 7% of the general population, and ESFJ accounted for 27% of churchgoers, compared with 6% of the general population. Over-representation of ISFJ and ESFJ among churchgoers led to under-representation of other types.

A more extensive profile of Anglican churchgoers in England was reported by Francis, Robbins, and Craig (2011) in a study including 2,135 women and 1,169 men. This study analysed the profiles of men and women separately alongside the population norms published by Kendall (1998). Exploring the dichotomous preferences, the data demonstrated that female churchgoers are more introverted than women in the general population (49% compared with 43%) and more inclined to prefer judging (85% compared with 62%). On the other hand, there are no significant differences in levels of preferences for sensing by female churchgoers (81%) and women in the general population (79%), or in levels of preference for feeling by female churchgoers (70%) and women in the general population. The data also demonstrated that male churchgoers are more introverted than men in the general population (62% compared with 53%), more inclined to prefer sensing (78% compared with 73%), more inclined to prefer feeling (42% compared with 35%), and more inclined to prefer judging (86% compared with 55%).

The comparison of the psychological type profile of people who attend different styles of services or forms of worship, even within the same denomination is illustrated, for example, by Village, Francis and Craig (2009) who found significant differences in type profiles between individuals attending evangelical Anglican churches and individuals attending Anglo-Catholic churches in England. These data demonstrated a significantly higher proportion of intuitives in the Anglo-Catholic congregations.

The connection between psychological type profile and preferred experiences of spirituality is illustrated, for example, by Francis, Village, Robbins, and Ineson (2007) who examined the associations between psychological type and mystical orientation. Their data demonstrates a significant relationship between mystical orientation and the perceiving processing (sensing or intuition), but no relationship between mystical orientation and psychological orientation (introversion and extraversion), the judging process (feeling or thinking), and attitudes toward the outer world (judging or perceiving). Intuitive types were more open than sensing types to mystical orientation.

### **Research question**

The Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research team has conducted regular survey work among church congregations over two decades (Kaldor, Bellamy, Correy, & Powell, 1992; Kaldor, Bellamy, Moore, Powell, Castle, & Correy, 1995; Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Castle, & Hughes, 1999; Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Hughes, & Castle, 1997; Kaldor, Dixon, Powell, Bellamy, Hughes, Moore, & Dalziel, 1999; Bellamy & Castle, 2004; Bellamy, Cussen, Sterland, Castle, Powell, & Kaldor, 2006; Kaldor & McLean 2009; Kaldor, McLean, Brady, Jacka, & Powell, 2009). The more recent surveys conducted by this team have routinely included a measure of psychological type in order to explore ways in which psychological type theory may promote further insights into congregational life. In particular data from the 2006 NCLS congregational survey explored levels of participation in various types of congregational group activities. Drawing on these data the research aim of the present study is to examine the extent to which different types of congregational group activities attract participation reflecting individual psychological type preferences.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The present analysis was conducted on the data provided by 2,355 participants in the 2006 wave of the Australian National Church Life Survey who completed Form D of the congregational questionnaire, responding to all the items of the Francis Psychological Type Scales and to the item concerning group activities. This group of participants comprised 923 Catholics, 487 Anglicans, 719 Protestants, and 226 Pentecostals; 993 men, 1,345 women, and 17 individuals who did not disclose their sex; 386 individuals under the age of thirty, 672 in their thirties and forties, 873 in their fifties or sixties, 370 aged seventy or over, and 54 who did not disclose their age.

### **Measures**

*Psychological type* was assessed by the Francis Psychological Type Scale (FPTS: Francis, 2005). This is a 40-item instrument comprising four sets of 10 forced-choice items relating to each of the four components of psychological type: the two orientations (extraversion and introversion), the two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), the two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and the two attitudes toward the outer world (judging and perceiving). Participants were asked for each pair of characteristics to check ‘the box next to that characteristic which is closer to the real you, even if you feel both characteristics apply to you. Tick the characteristic that reflects the real you, even if other people see you differently’.

*Involvement with group activities* was assessed by the question, ‘Are you regularly involved in any group activities here? (Mark ALL that apply).’ The two categories applied in the present analysis are: Yes, in small prayer, discussion or Bible study group; Yes in fellowship clubs, social and other groups.

### **Analysis**

The scientific literature on psychological type employs the self-selection ratio (*I*) developed by McCaulley (1985), as an extension of Chi square, to test simultaneously the



component parts of type theory. Full type tables were constructed and compared for those who participated in the two categories of group activities with those who did not participate in each activity. Only the relevant information from these type tables will be displayed.

### **Results**

Table 1 compares first the proportions of extraverts, intuitive types, feeling types, and judging types who participate in fellowship groups with those who do not participate in fellowship groups. Then table 1 compares the proportions of extraverts, intuitive types, feeling types, and judging types who participate in small prayer or study groups with those who do not participate in small prayer or study groups. These data show that extraverts and feeling types are over-represented in fellowship groups, with the consequence that introverts and thinking types are under-represented in fellowship groups. These data also show that intuitive types are over-represented in small prayer or study groups, with the consequence that sensing types are under-represented in small prayer or study groups.

- insert table 1 about here -

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore whether psychological type theory could help to illuminate ways in which various types of congregational group activities might appeal to different types of participants. Data provided by 2,355 churchgoers in the 2006 Australian National Church Life Survey have demonstrated a small but statistically significant connection between personal psychological type preferences and participation in two different and distinctive forms of congregational group activities, namely fellowship groups and small prayer or study groups. The difference reported by the data are highly consistent with the underlying theory.

The fellowship groups attracted an over-representation of extraverts. This finding is consistent with the underlying theory that extraverts are energised by the outer world of

people and things. Extraverts enjoy meeting people; extraverts enjoy conversation; extraverts enjoy activities. Fellowship groups clearly resource these aspects of the extraverted personality. Churches should not be unduly surprised that introverted churchgoers may prefer to allow the fellowship groups to pass them by. Introverted churchgoers are resourced in other ways.

The fellowship groups also attracted an over-representation of feeling types. This finding is consistent with the underlying theory that feeling types are more concerned with the relational side of church life than with the more abstract and cerebral aspects of the faith. Feeling types enjoy getting alongside other people; feeling types enjoy sharing other people's stories, experiences and concerns; feeling types enjoy supporting other people. Fellowship groups clearly resource these aspects of the feeling side of personality. Churches should not be unduly surprised that thinking types in the church congregation may prefer to allow the fellowship groups to pass them by. Thinking types in the church congregation are resourced in other ways.

The small prayer or study groups attract an over-representation of intuitive types. This is consistent with the underlying theory that intuitive types are more concerned with the exploratory side of religious faith than with getting on with the practical expression of faith. Intuitive types are keen to explore new ideas, discover new things and test new theories. Small prayer or study groups clearly resource these aspects of the intuitive side of personality. Churches should not be unduly surprised that sensing types in the church congregation may prefer to allow the prayer and study groups to pass them by. Sensing types in the church congregation are resourced in other ways.

The present study has worked with a relatively small number of churchgoers (2,355) to test the connection between psychological type preferences and participation in just two different types of congregational group activity. In light of the sample size analysis has been

restricted to just one aspect of psychological type theory, the dichotomous preferences and has not looked at men and women separately. The results, however, support the overall usefulness of the theory to help to account for the distinctive appeal of these two different types of congregational group activity. Future research in this tradition would benefit from including a wider range of more specifically defined congregational group activities and gathering data from a larger sample of participants in order to allow further analysis of the 16-complete types among men and women separately.

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Table 1: *Participation by dichotomous type preferences*

	participation		<i>I</i>	<i>p</i> <
	yes %	no %		
<u>fellowship groups</u>				
extraverts	49	41	0.83	.001
intuitive types	21	17	0.84	NS
feeling types	57	52	0.91	.05
judging types	87	88	1.01	NS
N (2192)	763	1429		
<u>small prayer or study groups</u>				
extraverts	46	42	0.93	NS
intuitive types	23	16	0.71	.001
feeling types	55	53	0.96	NS
judging types	86	89	1.04	NS
N (2194)	789	1405		